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Lucia A Keegan 12/19/2006 11:49:45 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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FROM USUNESCO PARIS

FOR OES - ANDREW REYNOLDS, ANTOINETTE CONDO, BARRIE RIPIN, CHRISTINE  
DAWSON  
FOR IO - JIM DUFTY  
DEPARTMENT PASS NSF FOR ROSE GOMBAY  
DEPARTMENT PASS OSTP FOR GENE WHITNEY  
DEPARTMENT PASS USGS FOR VERNE SCHNEIDER, MATTHEW LARSEN

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCI](#) [SENV](#) [AORC](#) [EAID](#)  
SUBJECT: UNESCO REFORM: NATURAL SCIENCES SECTOR PONDERES POTENTIAL  
RAMIFICATIONS OF ONGOING REVIEW

11. SUMMARY: U.S. National Commission for UNESCO Executive Director Susanna Connaughton used her December meetings with leaders of UNESCO's Natural Sciences Sector to query them on the ongoing review of the Sciences sectors, and on how they assess the impact of their programs. Her interlocutors, who included Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences Erdelen, highlighted the need for the panel to: define a role for UNESCO science vis-a-vis the rest of the UN family; suggest ways to increase UNESCO's visibility; encourage interdisciplinary work; and reflect on an appropriate system of peer review. From these conversations, it emerged that coordinating advice to governments in improving national science and technology infrastructure is becoming a new focus of the Natural Sciences sector, although these efforts do not appear to be concerted within the sector. While it was clear that individual members of the Natural Sciences sector were determined to put a positive spin on the work of the review panel, this is a subject that is evidently of great concern to them.

12. On U.S. cooperation with the Natural Sciences sector, a planned February 2007 visit by ADG Erdelen will be an opportunity for him to meet with interested members of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. At the 2007 General Conference, UNESCO plans to host a Ministerial Roundtable on Science and Technology, similar to the one organized in 2005 and attended by OSTP Director Marburger and NSF Director Bement; the organizers hope for similarly high-level U.S. participation in 2007. On U.S. involvement with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Executive Secretary Bernal highlighted the fact that he and the NSF are in the process of considering negotiation of a direct agreement, noting that the NSF is currently seconding staff to the IOC. USUNESCO science officer (notetaker) accompanied Connaughton to her meetings. End

## Summary.

ADG Erdelen: We need increased visibility

13. Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences Erdelen opened his meeting with Connaughton by highlighting the bustle of activity engendered by the C4/C5 (medium-term strategy, draft program and budget) deadlines, and by the sciences review panel. He stressed the challenge of coordinating the five science regional field offices, and category I and II centers in "a joint exercise with a joint product." He expressed the hope that the review would produce positive results "in terms of the stature of the sector and programmatic support and budget." Erdelen noted somewhat philosophically "every scientist needs a peer review process," although he rejected "change for the sake of change."

14. Erdelen posited that the panel's work had been "quite a bit delayed" due to its members' need to familiarize themselves with the organization, and to their own divergent backgrounds. Looking forward, he said he hoped the panel would present a vision of the "future niche" of UNESCO's sciences programs "within the UN family, and how these programs relate to the development discussion." Currently, Erdelen noted, his sector plays a lead role in coordinating UN agencies in the field of S/T only in the context of the African Union, where as lead agency in the S and T cluster, UNESCO is organizing a ministerial summit. Queried on the possibility of merging the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences sectors, Erdelen said the focus of the review should be programs, not structures.

15. Queried by Connaughton on how the U.S. National Commission could help his sector, Erdelen responded "marketing, marketing, marketing." He said he hoped that the review panel would address the issue of the visibility of the Natural Sciences sector: "When most people think of UNESCO, they think culture." He observed that partnerships, such as those UNESCO currently has with L'Oreal and Daimler-Chrysler, are important in this regard. Erdelen reported plans to visit Washington in mid-February 2007 for meetings at the World Bank. He and Connaughton agreed that this would also be an excellent opportunity for him to meet with interested members of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.

WATER SECTOR: WE ARE ALREADY INTERDISCIPLINARY

16. In his meeting with Connaughton, IHP Executive Director Andras Szollosi-Nagy took an upbeat attitude towards the ongoing review of the two sciences sectors. Noting that the panel advocates interdisciplinary approaches, he claimed "we are very interdisciplinary" citing three activities: IHP conflict resolution programs in water resources that involve psychological and social sciences techniques, game theory and math modelling; a comprehensive, cross-sector history of water and civilization; and a comprehensive water education program. One the latter, he noted a task force designated to design the program would meet at the end of January 2007; current plans involve the U.S. NGO WET. Overall, Szollosi-Nagy professed lack of concern about the review, asserting that the IHP "flies" in developing countries. (Note: the IHP's insufficient presence at the country level in Africa is a recurring theme at the meetings of the programs' governing council. End Note.) Szollosi-Nagy said that he hoped that panel members would resist the temptation to "micro-manage", and focus instead on ways of improving UNESCO's interdisciplinary science work. Queried on the possibility of combining the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences sectors, Szollosi-Nagy declared himself in favor, noting that UNESCO has a tendency "to artificially build up walls."

17. Regarding U.S. engagement with the IHP, Szollosi-Nagy spoke very positively about his recent trip to Washington to participate in the meeting of the U.S. National Committee for the IHP, although he cited as a challenge the fact that the committee has no means of funding the travel of its members to meetings. He also stressed the importance of the U.S. running for a seat on the Intergovernmental Council of the IHP, saying that U.S. professional expertise is needed if the program is to be "a serious, global program."

OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION: Peer Review, Please

18. Queried by Connaughton on how the IOC measures success,

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Executive Secretary Patricio Bernal evoked the sciences review panel. He noted, "What is lacking is clear direction from UNESCO member states on our goals - what is UNESCO asking us to do?" Bernal mused that scientists are by nature very independent. They are used to responding to "the internal needs of science itself, and are driven by holes in knowledge" rather than to "outside, social needs." In this context, the role of the IOC is "to translate the latest scientific data to governments, so that they can take this into account, as well as to translate the priorities of government to the science community." But UNESCO's intergovernmental programs are not validated by peer review to see how well they respond to the high-level requests of governments. This is needed, but it is difficult to know who would provide peer review, given the fact that these scientific organizations are comprised of governments, rather than of individual scientists.

¶9. Bernal described the IOC's work as divided into three streams. These include: ocean sciences (support to world climate research program, harmful algae blooms); earth observations (global ocean observation system); and capacity building, including via a small network of UNESCO chairs. Regarding the first two, the IOC chiefly works via the concerted action of its member states; the USG plays a vital leading role. On capacity building, the IOC assumes a role in developing African institutional capacity by providing "coaching" to leaders of oceanographic institutions.

¶10. On U.S. involvement with the IOC, Bernal highlighted the fact that he and NSF counterparts are considering the possibility of negotiating a direct agreement; he noted that the NSF is currently seconding staff to the IOC. He said that the recent visit by NOAA staff focussing on results-based management had already resulted in several recommendations.

#### Basic Sciences: A UNESCO Role in Policy Best Practices

¶11. Connaughton used her meeting with Basic Sciences and Engineering Division Director Maciej Nalecz to query him on how he measures the impact of his programs. Rather than responding directly, he evoked three ongoing exercises within the context of the International Basic Sciences Program (IBSP) that he said he hoped would yield results in the future. These included: assistance to Egypt in assessing the research and technology achievements resulting from its higher education curriculum, to serve as the basis of a planned reform, an effort led by former Ministers of Pakistan and Chile; advice to Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean countries on using their oil/gas wealth to "reconstitute" regional science and technology at the university level, an effort that will be led by a former South African minister; and finally, discussions planned for February 2007 with Nigeria on constructing a center for nanotechnology. Nalecz acknowledged that the Science Policy division of the Natural Sciences Sector is engaged in similar work in a number of developing countries, most notably in helping Nigeria set up an international expert panel to advise on a major investment in science infrastructure. Nalecz said that coordination takes place as required. (Note: Although developed independently, these efforts also seem to dovetail with the work of the IOC in "coaching" leaders of science institutions in Africa. End Note.)

¶12. Regarding U.S. engagement with programs in his division, Nalecz pointed to the SESAME program (a program to promote Mid-East cooperation in particle physics), as well as to the participation of OSTP Director Marburger and NSF Director Bement in the October 2005 UNESCO Ministerial Roundtable on the Basic Sciences, which he warmly praised. Nalecz confided that due to the success of this conference, UNESCO plans to host a similar conference at the 2007 General Conference; two themes currently under consideration: the role of science and technology in achieving the MDGs, and means of combating "brain drain." Nalecz hoped for high-level U.S. participation in this conference.

Oliver